

country not like anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. More than 95 million vaccine doses have reached American arms; another 2 million every single day. COVID-related deaths have plummeted, now less than half of their high, particularly for the elderly and the vulnerable. Science reaffirms kids can be safely in the classroom right now. States are starting to lift blanket restrictions, freeing citizens and small businesses to follow smart precautions themselves. For weeks, every indicator has suggested our economy is poised to come roaring back, with more job openings for Americans who need work.

None of these trends began on January 20. President Biden and his Democratic government inherited a tide that had already begun to turn toward decisive victory.

In 2020, Congress passed five historic bipartisan bills to save our health system, protect our economic foundations, and fund Operation Warp Speed to find vaccines. Senate Republicans led the bipartisan CARES Act that got our country through the last year.

The American people already built the parade that has been marching toward victory; Democrats just want to sprint in front of the parade and claim credit.

So when 10 Republican Senators went to the White House to suggest working together, the Democrats said: Uh, no. Both the Democratic leader and the White House Chief of Staff now indicate they think President Obama's problem was that he was too bipartisan.

This time, as one journalist put it, the situation was "Democrats to GOP: Take it or leave it." The "it" that we are talking about here was a bill that only spent about 1 percent on vaccines and about 9 percent on the entire health fight. The rest of the tab went to things like this: a \$350 billion bailout for State and local budgets unrelated to pandemic needs, with strings attached to stop States from cutting taxes on their own citizens down the road—take the money, you don't get to cut taxes; massive Federal school funding spread over several years, without requiring quickly reopening; sweeping new government benefits with no work requirements whatsoever—a time warp to the bad times before bipartisan welfare reform—which Democrats already say they want to make permanent; and agricultural assistance conditioned not on specific financial need but solely on the demographics of the farmer, which some liberal activists are celebrating as "reparations." Only about 20 percent of the spending went to \$1,400 direct checks, to try to keep all of the unrelated socialism out of the spotlight.

This wasn't a bill to finish off the pandemic; it was a multitrillion-dollar Trojan horse full of bad, old liberal ideas. President Biden's own staff keep calling this legislation "the most progressive bill in American history"—

hardly the commonsense bipartisanism that the President promised.

So we pause today at the 1-year mark to remember and to mourn, but we also look with great optimism toward the future. Twenty twenty-one is set to be a historic comeback year, not because of the far-left legislation that was passed after the tide had already turned but because of the resilience of the American people.

(Mr. PADILLA assumed the Chair.)

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, at noon today, the Senate will vote on whether to pluck the Becerra nomination out of committee after it failed to garner enough support to advance.

Every one of President Biden's nominations the Senate has considered so far has received bipartisan support for confirmation. There is a reason Mr. Becerra could not get one single Republican vote to move out of committee. It is because he is such a thoroughly partisan actor with so little subject-matter expertise and such a demonstrated history of hostility toward basic values like the freedom of conscience. There is nothing about Mr. Becerra's record in Congress or in California to suggest he is the best possible person to run the Department of Health and Human Services in the middle of a once-in-a-generation viral pandemic—not even close.

This is too important a job at too important a time for this administration to put raw partisanship ahead of qualifications. So I would strongly urge all Senators to vote against rescuing this nomination from committee. Let's give the President the opportunity to make a better selection.

TRIBUTE TO MARY SUIT JONES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, as I have mentioned, it is customary for some top Senate staff positions to see new faces when party control changes hands.

Today, it is my honor to pay tribute to Mary Suit Jones, a huge asset to this institution who has become an institution herself.

Tomorrow, Mary will finish her second separate run as Assistant Secretary of the Senate and conclude a Senate career that has spanned more than a quarter of a century.

I first met Mary Jones in the mid-1990s when we brought her on board to help manage my office. Neither I nor Mary's colleagues back then could have predicted that nearly 30 years later, she would depart as one of the most senior officers in the entire place. But the truth is, if you had told us, nobody would have been even a little surprised either.

I have entrusted Mary with a lot of different responsibilities over the years. She served as our office manager

just a few years out of college. She came with me to the Rules Committee, first as deputy staff director and then the top job. Senator Frist had the good judgment to ask her to be Assistant Secretary in the early 2000s. Then she returned to Rules and resumed serving as our staff director under Senators Bob Bennett, Lamar Alexander, and then Pat Roberts. Finally, she generously brought all of this expertise and institutional knowledge back to the Assistant Secretary role 6 years ago.

In her first job in my office, Mary organized one team of people and our infrastructure. In her current job, she has overseen 26 departments and scores of Senate staff, pushing resources and guidance down and pushing information up. In between, at Rules, she tackled things like helping run Presidential inaugurations.

Through it all, I cannot name one time when Mary Jones did not deliver. She is consistent, competent, and completely reliable. No wonder her name has become a kind of catchphrase around the Senate when anyone is trying to track down some key piece of wisdom or is puzzling over how to get something done: "Well, let's ask Mary Jones." "Have you checked with Mary Jones?" "I think Mary knows all about that."

Everyone from junior staff to senior Senators, Republicans and Democrats, have been able to count on Mary for expertise and execution. On a million different subjects, she knows the answer to the question you are going to ask before you even finish asking it. A rock-solid administrator, a consummate professional—she is just that good.

So I am sorry to see Mary depart the Senate, but she has given generously to this place. She has certainly earned the opportunity to apply her many talents to some new challenges and perhaps knock a few miles off of her famously epic commute while she is at it.

The whole Senate thanks Mary for her excellent service. We wish her, her husband, and their kids all the best in the exciting new chapters that lie ahead.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to discharge the nomination of Xavier Becerra from the Committee on Finance.

The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate is now debating the motion to discharge from the Finance Committee the nomination of California Attorney